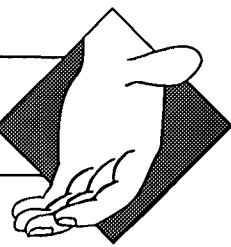


SHARING SKILLS



Tools for Finding and Citing Sources:

TOMORROW'S PROBLEM SOLVERS

Today's young people need broad, accurate knowledge, a penchant for deep reflection, and, maybe most importantly, a sense of hope. When their teachers and library media specialists (you and I) were students, we heard the warnings that the life-sustaining elements of our environment were in danger. Our students not only face the reality of this frightening prediction, but now face the fact that they have inherited a planet where much has gone awry. Paul Hawken, in his book *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*, states that all of us—younger and older—are bombarded with frequent and graphic accounts of immense disasters, from hurricanes and mudslides, to extinction of the songbirds that used to visit our back yards, to collisions of cultures, life styles, and human values (2000).

I hope, therefore, that our students will find inspiration and learn skills in our library media centers to counter these disheartening realities with the enthusiastic creativity that is youth's particular domain. Hopefully, here among books, letters, and sources of information, they will

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learn how to acquire broad, accurate knowledge to make present and future decisions. Hopefully, within our problem-solving learning environments, they will experience the difference between superficial fact-finding that leads to nominal solutions, and deep reflection that offers hopefulness as a credible life stance (ALA, TLA 2005).

Broad and Accurate Knowledge

Let's, then, take a fresh look at the Dewey Decimal System. We should look, however, beyond its readily apparent value as a tool for organizing and locating materials, to thinking of this classification system as a provider of cognitive possibilities that offers distinct perspectives to view any issue. Admittedly, Dewey's system is not the only epistemological tool in the world of libraries. Its Western World view has been criticized (Williams State Library Tutorial 1999), as has its audacious squeezing of all human experience into ten categories (MacDonell 2003). Further, we have seen how institutions of higher learning have welcomed the Library of Congress's ad-

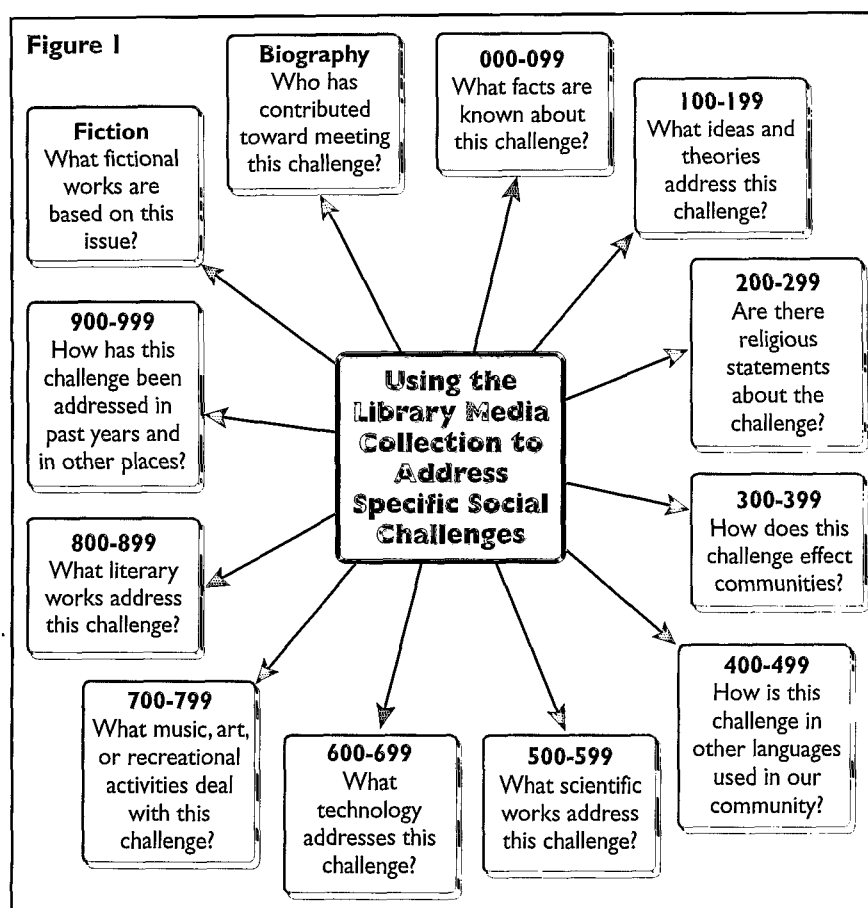
ditional eleven categories for addressing increasingly complex and expanding knowledge bases (Kanne 2003). Yet, it is the Dewey system's very temerity and conciseness that may appeal to young people who are called on to make sense of puzzling and difficult information challenges.

The first part of the discussion centers on the Dewey Decimal System as an easy and accessible point of entry for students to use in the problem-solving process. The second part deals with paradoxes presented by another easily used source of information, the online database. The conclusion reflects on the role of instructional library media programs and on the potential of these programs to foster hopefulness.

Looking at Social Issues in Terms of the Library Media Collection

Propose any topic, ask the questions embedded in Figure 1 (see page 30), and find logical, comprehensive ways of explaining what is known or thought about that topic. For example, when students want facts, we lead them to "Generalities." If

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they want to explore ideas and theories about a topic, we head for the section on philosophy, or, as many say with young children, the section on "thinking."

Recently, for example, the 200s have taken on a new importance that we would not have imagined earlier. For some students, books in this section may be the only place they can find basic understanding of the diverse sentiments and attitudes that may be shaping the viewpoints of their peers throughout the world. Students from other countries are considering the same topics that our students are researching. The 300s, we can explain, offer viewpoints on a shrunken world, by giving cultural insights into neighborhoods, communities, and entire societies. Besides mere translations, the 400s may

contain works published in other countries and written in other languages, with surprising viewpoints and emphases. In addition, this section can help learners consider if international treatments vary and how these treatments can impact a reader's thinking about a topic.

Finding information under science in the 500s and technology in the 600s can model the problem-solving approach that offers students a structure for analyzing and synthesizing the facts they find. Furthermore, these works can lead students toward effective interdisciplinary connections that may enhance their classroom performance. More creative approaches can be found in the fine arts of the 700s and in the literary works of the 800s. Information in these areas can encourage

students to approach their topics with originality and creativity. These sections are also valuable because of their appeal to developing alternative learning styles and generating creative thinking. Finally, treatment of historical and geographical issues in the 900s can help students step back and take broader views, leading them to see frontiers beyond the boundaries of present time and space.

Deep Reflection

The passage from print to electronic media has led educators, in general, to a crossroads. Technology, through online databases, has given our students the ability to locate information almost instantaneously. Students who use these databases may have more time available to them for reflection than did earlier researchers who were required to juggle note cards in one hand and bibliography cards in the other.

So what do our programs do to help students make good use of that extra time? Do we provide assignments that cause young scholars to broaden and deepen the information that they have? Do we require them to concentrate on analyzing and synthesizing, on proposing solutions, and considering reactions to those proposals? Or do we eat up their extra time by requiring myriad details about their online sources because we consider it our duty to see that today's students spend a long time looking up and recording bibliographic information about every source—just as we once had to do?

The alternative to these previous guidelines for research is revolutionary. Far better documentation, than any of yesterday's ref-

erence librarians dreamed of, can now be accomplished by young learners instantaneously. Today's students can not only cite online resources simply by copying and pasting a site's name and URL into an electronic bibliography, but they can, within a split second, take readers directly to their sources—a feat that was (and still may be) inconceivable to their predecessors. The crossroads is clear when we ask the following questions: Do we give students opportunities to use the extra time that technology provides for moving into critical thought, or do we chain them to the lowest rungs of the ladder by multiplying clerical demands on their time? This distinction is critical because it implies radically different frameworks for library media programs. Will our programs become mere extensions of the record-keeping world or, on the other hand, havens for young scholars? If we opt for the latter, then we opt to help students develop wider perspectives and deeper reflective capacities.

Today's students have another controversial advantage over predecessors who once labored to copy notes by hand so that they could later review, paraphrase, and critique those notes. Now, students can copy and paste information in less time than it takes to sharpen a pencil.

Admittedly, the technique of copy and paste may be a somewhat despised technology in some circles. However, this lowly procedure can, if properly employed, promote reflection. That is, if we want students to acquire higher-level thinking skills, we owe it to them to let them garner a great deal of accurate information. In my experience as a

library media specialist, I have learned that students as young as elementary school understand that copied information does not belong to them, and they do not expect to be able to copy information and then turn it in as their own. Furthermore, they can understand that some sources allow copying and that others do not. Knowing this, they appreciate our school's online databases that license us to copy and use text and images within educational settings. Good library media programs provide information to show students ethically acceptable ways of utilizing such permission.

A Sense of Hope

As library media specialists, we are heirs to an institution that historically has contributed to quests for information and meaning. Students who now are preparing to solve present and future problems need the information found in the library media center to show them how to meet today's realities with positive, solution-finding mentalities. They need to learn to organize, present, and re-examine their own thinking as they study history with "solutions" that range from the great to the ghastly. Furthermore, they need time and space to develop their reflective powers and to refine their problem-solving skills. Above all, they need a sense that it is all worthwhile, that mistakes can be remedied.

In 1941, there were fewer than twenty whooping cranes left on the planet. Today, because informed and determined persons understood the problem, floated solutions, and came up

with remedies, more than 420 whooping cranes are alive in experimental colonies (San Antonio Zoo 2005). This fact gives all of us hope. When students begin seeing their projects as steps toward solutions of important problems, they move ahead with a youthful optimism that even the disasters of these past few years has not destroyed. Yet, as we know from our own frequent encounters with the world's desperation, any optimism needs the kind of sheltering and nourishing that instructional library media programs can provide.

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